

(COVER IN MICROSOFT PUBLISHER)

LESSONS LEARNED REVIEW

FIRE SEASON 2002

ABBREVIATIONS

BLM	Bureau of Land Management
DOD	Department of Defense
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
MAC	Multi Agency Coordination (Process)
NPS	National Park Service
NRCS	Natural Resources Conservation Service
SWACG	Southwest Area Coordination Group
SWCC	Southwest Coordination Center
SWGA	Southwest Geographic Area
SWAMAC	Southwest Area Multi Agency Coordination Group
SWSREC	Southwest Strategy Regional Executive Committee
USGS	U.S. Geological Survey

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INTRODUCTION

The 2002 fire season in the Southwest Geographic Area was the most severe in over 50 years, with both New Mexico and Arizona experiencing their largest wildland fires in history. The months of drought conditions and extreme fire danger resulted in 4,700 fires that burned 974,000 acres and destroyed over 500 structures.

The magnitude and severity of this fire season presented many new and unique challenges to the wildland fire management agencies. Historic drought conditions necessitated an early mobilization for fire prevention, preparedness, severity and suppression resources. Difficult decisions had to be made for the allocation of scarce resources to multiple fires, implementation of fire restrictions and closure of public lands. Prescribed fire programs were greatly reduced and eventually suspended as fuels and burning conditions became untenable.

However, largely due to proactive planning, the pre-positioning and aggressive use of preparedness resources, initial and extended attack suppression efforts resulted in great success in preventing greater resource damage and structure loss. Many communities and the general public now recognize that the hazardous fuels conditions are a primary cause of the existing problem, and that these same conditions will persist and continue to contribute to the future severity of fire seasons.

The Southwest Strategy Regional Executive Committee (SWSREC) requested that an interagency team of agency administrators and wildland fire experts conduct a post-season review to capture lessons learned during this record fire season. The review was to be comprehensive in nature and focus on issues that would help the fire management programs improve organizational effectiveness and interagency relationships.

This Lessons Learned Review addresses opportunities to improve effectiveness in the geographic area with coordination groups and agency administrators. The recommendations are centered on actions to improve safety, cost effectiveness, and interagency implementation of the National Fire Plan.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Lessons Learned Review team gathered information and developed four themes and 17 issues through interviewing 32 agency personnel and studying 29 current reviews and policy papers applicable to the Southwest Geographic Area. The 17 recommendations all address one or more of the SWSREC's three principal concerns related to the National Fire Plan: safety, cost effectiveness and interagency relations (Review Team members' names are listed in Attachment 1, interviewees' names in Attachment 2, reviews and policy papers in Attachment 3, and pertinent wildland fire terminology in Attachment 4.)

The three key elements for quality interagency wildland fire management at the geographic area level are involved Agency Administrators, highly effective interagency coordination groups, and efficient coordination systems. Agency Administrators must set boundaries and share expectations for cost efficiency, safety and overall goals and objectives with Multi Agency Coordination Groups, fire management officers and the incident command system organization.

Safety is improved and cost efficiency increased at the geographic level through quality Wildland Fire Situational Analysis documents and incident Agency Administrators' briefings. Good interagency relations, interagency fire management plans, aggressive interagency fuels programs, well-developed cost-share agreements, a clear availability policy, and effective Coordination groups and processes also are

critical. The 17 recommendations include five whose immediate implementation could produce benefits with less effort and time invested. These five are outlined below.

Agency Administrator Fire & Aviation Team (Recommendation 1)

The proposed Agency Administrator Fire and Aviation Team would help ensure that the recommendations from this and other reviews of the southwest area's fire and aviation program would be brought to closure. In the past, the interagency wildland fire community has excelled in identifying issues that need to be resolved and areas for improvement. However, sometimes the implementation of needed changes or improvements have been limited by the Agency Administrators' lack of ability, support or desire for change. The active involvement of Agency Administrators with the review recommendations through this team would bring long-term benefits to the whole interagency fire program.

National Fire Plan & SWACG (Recommendation 8)

The tasks and actions in the 2002 National Fire Plan are designed for geographic and zone interagency planning and accomplishment. The recommendation that the SWACG expand their interagency role and responsibilities to include the National Fire Plan fits well with upcoming national direction.

Levels of Geographic Area Coordination & Dispatching (Recommendation 11)

National direction given to the wildland fire agencies in the Federal Fire Policy and the Interagency Management Review Team Report requires that there only be two levels of full-time coordination and dispatching in geographic areas. This direction is a direct result of safety and cost problems

experienced in the past. This review also reflects recommendations in three other reviews of the Southwest coordination systems this year. The recommendation also outlines other possible benefits from redefining zone boundaries, their roles and Agency Administrators' responsibilities.

Agency Administrator Support for the Southwest Coordination System (Recommendations 3)

Agency Administrators must understand the logistical, funding allocation and staffing needs of the coordination system for the Southwest Geographic Area. They must also be involved in resolving these needs and fully supporting the system. A fully functioning coordination system establishes and maintains an environment that improves safety and lowers costs.

Prevention & Closure Program (Recommendation 16)

The Southwest Geographic Area has available examples and drafts of proactive, preplanned prevention and closure strategies. This review recommends the geographic area adopt these plans for their use next year.

Timely action on these five recommendations will help improve an already highly functional interagency fire and aviation management program. Addressing the full 17 recommendations will increase safety for both firefighters and the public, and improve the cost effectiveness of the total fire and aviation program for the wildland fire agencies of the southwest. The review team developed the recommendations from information gathered through the interviews and recommendations from past reviews and reports (listed in Attachment 3). (Note: These past reviews and reports total over 700 pages, with their executive summaries totaling over 50 pages. They will be made available upon request.)

THEMES and RECOMMENDATIONS

Theme 1: Agency Administrator Involvement

Field-level Agency Administrators were involved with Incident Management and Area Command Teams during 2002 and were effective overall in dealing with Wildland Fire Situation Analysis documents, delegations of authorities and team briefings. The following recommendations outline areas for additional agency administrator involvement that would improve safety, program efficiency and cost effectiveness in the future.

Recommendation 1 -- The Southwest Strategy Regional Executive Committee (SWSREC) establish a seven-person team made up of field-level Agency Administrators who have a high understanding of and passion for fire and aviation management. The team members would be from the seven agencies of the Southwest Area Coordination Group (SWACG). The Agency Administrator Fire and Aviation Team would function as an interface to all wildland fire agency administrators in the geographic area and serve as a Fire and Aviation Subcommittee to the SWSREC. This team would help the SWACG by communicating issues and programs to gain understanding and support among their agency administrator peer group. The team should focus on issues that affect safety, costs, policy, and potential opportunities for additional quality Agency Administrator involvement.

Recommendation 2 -- The Agency Administrator Fire and Aviation Team be given the responsibility to help the SWACG accomplish the recommendations of the Lessons Learned 2002 Review and the many other recommendations from other reviews this year. This team should also moni-

tor progress with the recommendations, and report progress status to the Regional Executive Team quarterly.

Recommendation 3 -- The regional executive members of the Southwest Area Multi Agency Coordination Group (SWAMAC) should be active in supporting the Multi Agency Coordination (MAC) process. The regional executives should select as their SWAMAC representatives agency employees who have an understanding of fire and aviation, can be available for long periods of time during the fire season to attend daily SWAMAC meetings, and have excellent interpersonal skills. The representatives must have specific dated and signed delegations of authority for this role. (Note: The MAC representative delegation of authority is now a standard document request from the U.S. Attorney in wildland fire civil and court cases.)

The SWSREC should select field Agency Administrators who could fill the position of Agency Administrator Liaison to the SWAMAC. This liaison role would lend agency administrator perspective to the MAC process and would not replace the role of the SWAMAC Agency Representatives.

In the future, SWSREC executives should become proactive to help the SWAMAC with selected national issues. The regional executives could be the contacts with national offices and the National Association of State Foresters for issues such as national policy changes during an ongoing fire season, and for needed resource availability support from other geographic areas for the spring fire season in the southwest.

Recommendation 4 -- The executives of the southwest wildland fire agencies meet each year with the SWACG and

the Agency Administrator Fire and Aviation Team for program updates, issue identification and training. This would be an excellent chance for the executives to receive refresher training in fire management leadership and the MAC Group process.

Recommendation 5 -- The southwest wildland fire agency executives require attendance to the national Fire Management Leadership Course by field-level Agency Administrators and the geographic Fire Management Leadership Course by sub-unit Agency Administrators such as District Rangers. This would increase agency administrators' skills, knowledge and leadership in the areas of fire safety and cost effectiveness. This course attendance is now required through the Federal Fire Policy, the National Fire Plan Action Plan and the Interagency Management Review Team Report.

The Agency Administrator Fire and Aviation Team develop a formal process for the mentoring and shadowing of Agency Administrators in their role with large fire management. Models available that have been developed by other geographic areas are available for reference. The U.S. Forest Service Southwest Region's *Line Officer Guide to Wildland Fire Decision Making* should be adjusted for interagency use for all seven southwest wildland fire agencies.

Field-level agency administrators be members or chairpersons of each SWACG Committee. Agency Administrators should participate and give oversight to all Zone Fire Boards and Zone MAC Groups. Zone agency administrators should hold annual meetings to discuss and train in the use of Wildland Fire Situation Analysis documents, local rules of engagement and delegations of authorities. This was

also recommended in four other reviews of the southwest this year.

Recommendation 6 -- The executives assist the SWACG with the fiscal and legal issues associated with the Joint Powers Agreement and the all risk authorities for FEMA and non-FEMA incidents.

Recommendation 7 -- The SWSREC request the SWACG to develop an interagency, geographic availability process based on preparedness level and unavailability reporting. Agencies such as DOD, NRCS and USGS should be asked to participate in supplying selected skilled positions to support the wildland fire effort. More information is available about these processes in a paper presented to SWACG by Bill Waterbury and a review of availability issues prepared by Nick Greear this year for the southwest.

Theme 2: Southwest Area Coordination Group (SWACG) Functions

The SWACG is comprised of five federal and two state natural resource agencies that have responsibility for wildland fire protection. The group has a longtime positive history to build upon for future growth and change.

Recommendation 8 -- The SWSREC assign the interagency oversight and coordination roles for the National Fire Plan to the SWACG. This would improve common uniform reporting for all agencies, provide a common process for grants and agreements with states, and ensure interagency planning for presuppression needs and fuels projects. The SWACG may want to establish a National Fire Plan Committee and full-time interagency coordinator position to fill these new roles. This new interagency cooperation and coordination should increase cost effectiveness and improve overall program

safety. This general direction is now included in the National Fire Plan Action Plan of July 17, 2002.

Recommendation 9 -- The SWACG now has Dispatching, Training, Equipment, Aviation, Weather, and Prevention Committees to help accomplish ongoing work and coordination. The SWACG should look at the advantages of establishing Operations, Prescribed Fire/Fire Ecology, Contracting, Incident Business Management, and National Fire Plan Committees. These additional committees would increase the amount of interagency work accomplished and free the SWACG to spend more effort on overall program and process effectiveness, rather than solving tactical problems in these areas. These additional committees could develop proposals for SWACG in emerging areas such as planning levels, prescribed fire limitations, cross-billing rules, and possible future sharing of existing and planned fire facilities and resources.

Recommendation 10 -- With the help of the Agency Administrators Fire and Aviation Team, the SWACG review and bring to closure the recommendations made during the 2002 season reviews dealing with the Coordination Center and Zones, the Fire Season Strategic Assessments and the MAC Process.

Recommendation 11 -- Geographic areas are directed by the Federal Fire Policy and the Interagency Management Review Team Report to have only two full-time levels of coordination and dispatching. The southwest now has the Geographic Coordination Center, zone coordination centers and--in many cases--sub-zone or single-agency dispatch centers. The 2002 BLM National Fire Preparedness Review Team recommended, "... an independent team be identified to

complete and evaluate the fire program to address zone boundaries and management and support organizations." This recommendation was also in the two reviews this year of the Geographic Coordination Center and in both Southwest Area Strategic Fire Assessments. A quality, fully staffed, two-level organization should improve communications, safety, and cost effectiveness. The redefined zones should also be the common interagency boundary for interagency training, prevention, expanded dispatch organizations, zone MAC groups, National Fire Plan action plan accomplishment, preparedness plans, fire management plans and severity requests. These roles for sub-geographic areas are now part of the National Fire Plan Action Plan.

Recommendation 12 -- The costs of the SWACG need to be shared on an equitable basis between all seven members. Many geographic areas have examples of workload-based formulas to determine interagency funding. SWACG should give oversight to one interagency severity request process. One single interagency severity request then could be sent to the National Interagency Fire Center from the southwest. This is another item in the National Fire Plan Action Plan. The SWACG should review the zone management of Type II Incident Management Teams to identify efficiencies that could be gained by geographic control at preset preparedness levels. The SWACG should plan a facilitated team enhancement /improvement session this winter to increase team process effectiveness. Through their website, the group should also share future meeting agenda items and meeting notes with the field.

Theme 3: Coordination System

The Southwest Coordination Center (SWCC) is located in the U.S. Forest Ser-

vice Southwest Regional Office. The coordination center was able to meet field needs within available resource pools in 2002 because of hard work by seasoned center employees and detailers. The future success of the center may depend on a number of needed actions.

Recommendation 13 -- The SWCC Director's position has been vacant for over a year and must be filled with someone who has full delegated authority to direct and supervise the center's interagency staff and programs. Zone coordinators need this same interagency authority for their positions. The funding of SWCC must be shared by all seven agencies equitably based on workload. The SWCC and zones must be fully staffed to provide optimum service, which will in turn increase total fire program safety and cost effectiveness.

Recommendation 14 -- The SWCC Director and SWACG bring to closure the recommendations from this year's two center reviews. One of these recommendations addressed the future site of the geographic coordination center. The Southwest Strategy Regional Executive Committee should obtain a quality survey and inventory of possible future sites for the SWCC. Potential sites must be cost effective, and provide a true interagency environment and quality workspace for the center and geographic MAC Group.

Recommendation 15 -- The needs of both the SWCC and zones be reviewed in a number of areas to ensure expectations are being met. This should at least include the use of staged, out-of-area incident management teams, needed prescribed fire support from the coordination system, and the control and daily status of severity resources in the geographic area.

Theme 4: Prevention and Outreach Program

The Southwest Geographic Area should have a coordinated, preplanned, human-caused wildland fire prevention and closure plan for its use during seasons such as year 2002. A quality strategic plan would greatly reduce human-caused wildland fires, improving safety and decreasing overall suppression costs.

Recommendation 16 -- The SWACG develop a human-caused wildland fire strategic assessment such as the Rocky Mountain Geographic Area Plan. The SWACG should finalize and approve the geographic Restrictions and Closures Procedures Plan drafted in July 2002.

Recommendation 17 -- then needed, the SWAMAC Group should include a Prevention Technical Specialist to coordinate interagency restrictions and closures and inform SWAMAC of program status and needs.

Attachment 1

REVIEW TEAM MEMBERS

Dave Behrens, Arizona State Lands
Alan Cox, Agency Administrator, National Park Service
Mike Edrington, Organizational Quality Associates
Jim Golden, Agency Administrator, U.S. Forest Service
Febe Ortiz, Natural Resources Conservation Service
Elaine Padovanj, U.S. Geological Survey
Ed Singleton, Agency Administrator, Bureau of Land Management
Frank Smith, New Mexico State Forestry Department
Edy Rhodes-Williams, U.S. Forest Service

Attachment 2

INTERVIEW LIST

1. Rick Reitz, SWACG Prevention Committee
2. Carl Holguin, SWACG Prevention Committee
3. Begui Livingston, SWACG Prevention Committee
4. Mike Rotonda, SWACG Aviation Committee
5. Willie Begay, BIA SWACG Member
6. Bob Lee, BLM SWACG Member
7. Pam McAlpin, BLM SWACG Member
8. Kirk Rodabaugh, Arizona State Lands SWACG Member
9. Bryan Swift, NPS SWACG Member
10. Bill Waterbury, U.S. Forest Service SWACG Member
11. Dave Boyd, SWCC
12. Jay Ellington, SWCC
13. Veron Ely, SWCC
14. Brian Lee, SWCC
15. Dewey Watson, SWCC
16. Mary Zabinski, SWCC
17. Tom Tobin, Central West Zone Coordinator
18. Carol Beinhold, Gila Zone Coordinator
19. Toby Martinez, New Mexico State Forester
20. Karen Wade, NPS Regional Director
21. John Waconda, BIA Regional Forester
22. John Philbin, BIA Regional Forester
23. Hal Grovert, NPS Associate Regional Director
24. John Lujan, NPS Superintendent
25. Able Camarena, Deputy Regional Forester, U.S. Forest Service
26. Larry Humphrey, National Incident Commander
27. Glen Joki, Southwest Area Incident Commander
28. Dan Oltrogee, National Incident Commander
29. Richard Nieto, Fire Management Officer
30. Tom Beddow, Fire Management Officer
31. Bill Maxon, Executive Director, Southwest Strategy
32. Bob Ensley, Deputy Fire Management Officer

Attachment 3

REFERENCES

Long-Range Fire Risk Assessment, Southwest Geographic Area, 2002 Fire Season, 2002

Draft Southwest Area Coordination Group Handbook, 2002

Southwest Area Coordination Center and Dispatch Review (Ensley) 5/15/02

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Southwest Area Coordination Center Operations Plan, 3/02

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Issues and Suggestions for the Future for the Southwest Fire Management Board (McAlpin) 7/02

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Colorado Human-Caused Wildland Fire Strategic Assessment, 10/18/02

Resource Availability for the Southwest Geographic Area (Grear) 5/29/02

Large Fire Review of Bullock, Borrego, Ponil and Roybal-Trampas Fires (Price) 7/02

Large Fire Review of Middle, Ryan, Peñasco, Dalton and Indian Fires (Meuchel) 5/02

Fire and Aviation Safety Team Review (Schrenk) 6/11/02

Ground Fire Safety Review (MacDonald) 6/14/02

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Lessons Learned Newsletters and Process, 2002

National Fire Plan, Managing the Impact of Wildfires on the Communities and the Environment, 10/25/02

A Collaborative Approach for Reducing Wildland Fire Risks to Communities and the Environment, a Ten-Year Comprehensive Strategy, 7/01

National Fire Plan, Tasks and Action Plan Summary, 7/20/02

Southwest Area Multi Agency Coordination Group Handbook, 7/02

Line Officers' Guide to Wildland Fire Decision Making, 2002

Interagency Management Review Team, South Canyon Fire, 6/26/95

Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy, 1/01

Attachment 4

WILDLAND FIRE MANAGEMENT TERMINOLOGY

Agency Administrator: Same as Line Officer; the official responsible for administering policy on an area of public land, having full authority for making decisions, and providing direction to the incident organization.

Agency Representative: The individual assigned by an agency who has delegated authority to make decisions affecting that agency's participation in incident management.

Area Command: An incident command system organization assigned to manage multiple incidents, each in turn managed by a separate incident command team. Area Command sets overall strategies and incident priorities, and coordinates activities of the incident command teams assigned to it.

Fire Management Plan: A strategic plan that defines a program to manage wildland fire and prescribed fire, and documents the fire management program in the approved land use plan.

Incident: An occurrence or event, either natural or human-caused, that requires an emergency response to prevent loss of life or damage to property or natural resources.

Incident Management Team: A command system organization assigned to manage an incident. This team sets objectives, and develops and carries out tactics to meet overall goals and strategies set by the agency administrator or Area Command.

Incident Command System: The combination of facilities, equipment, personnel, procedures and communications that operates within a common organizational structure and has the responsibility to manage resources to effectively accomplish the objectives set for an incident.

Multi Agency Coordination (MAC) Group: A group of agency administrators or their designated representatives who have the responsibility and authority to make decisions to implement policy, set priorities, assign scarce resources and coordinate activities for the various agencies in support of their emergency operations.

Wildland Fire: Any non-structure fire, other than prescribed fire, that occurs in the wildland.

Wildland Fire Situation Analysis: A decision-making process that evaluates alternative management strategies against safety, environmental, social, economic, political and resource management objectives as selection criteria.